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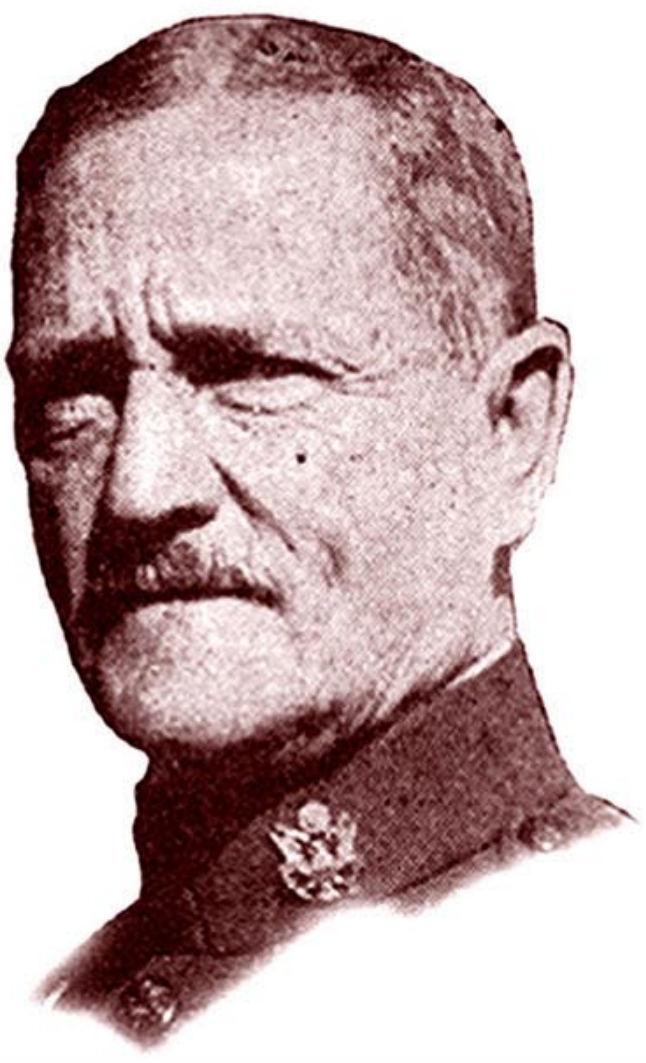
PERSHING

By Marquis James

Ever Hear About the Time the C.-in-C. Saluted a French Cow? Did You Know He Had the Right to Put "Attorney at Law" After His Name? That He Was Given Eight Hours' Extra Guard Duty for a Breach of Discipline at West Point? Do You Know Why He Was Chosen to Command the A. E. F.?



IN May of 1917, when Woodrow Wilson picked his man to head the American Expeditionary Forces which were to be, he did a thing which appears to be without precedent in history.

He picked a man he had never seen.

Nor had Newton D. Baker, the Secretary of War, who brought the name of Pershing to the President, ever set eyes on the military leader of his selection. The future commander of the Expeditionary Forces was not presented to the two executives who had chosen him for the work at hand until a fortnight before he sailed for France.

Mr. Baker sent a code telegram ordering Major General John J. Pershing to Washington from Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Major General Hugh L. Scott, the Chief of Staff and Pershing's senior in rank and long-time friend, took the latter to the Secretary's office and introduced him. Mr. Baker told Pershing he was to command the American forces, which were to go to France as soon as they could be made ready and embarked. Then they went across the street to the White House and Pershing was presented to the President.

A few days later—on May 18th—it was announced that Pershing would lead a division of Regulars to France. Up to that time there had been speculation as to when we would send troops across. There was a fairly strong impression that none would go for a long while yet. On May 28th Pershing and staff sailed secretly from New York, wearing civilian clothes.

Secretary Baker nominated and President Wilson selected Pershing to take charge of the A. E. F. on the showing of his past record. Particularly did his recent record as commander of the punitive expedition into Mexico

impress the President and the Secretary. The zeal and competence Pershing had displayed as a field commander showed that he retained the skill which had gained him fame and won him an astonishing promotion at the hands of Roosevelt for his work in the Philippines. The fidelity with which he obeyed orders from Washington—orders which were personally distasteful to him—also raised Pershing's stock with his superiors. Pershing could have caught Villa easily if he had been given a free hand. But he was not given a free hand. He was obliged to haul his own supplies, for instance, over more than one hundred miles of wild and hostile country when he might have seized a parallel railroad and utilized it. But when orders came from Washington not to touch this railroad or not to do this or do that, Pershing obeyed them without hesitation and without question.

Mr. Baker amplifies the hitherto unrevealed history of the choice of Pershing in a letter written for this article. From his law offices in Cleveland the former Secretary of War writes under date of August 13, 1924:

"The story you ask is interesting and has never been told, and I know of no reason why you should not have it exactly.

"When it was determined in 1917 to send an expeditionary force to France, I remarked to General Hugh L. Scott, Chief of Staff, that it would be necessary to send a commander who would ultimately become Commander-in-Chief of a very large force, and asked him to have sent to my house the records of all the general officers and senior colonels of the Regular Army.

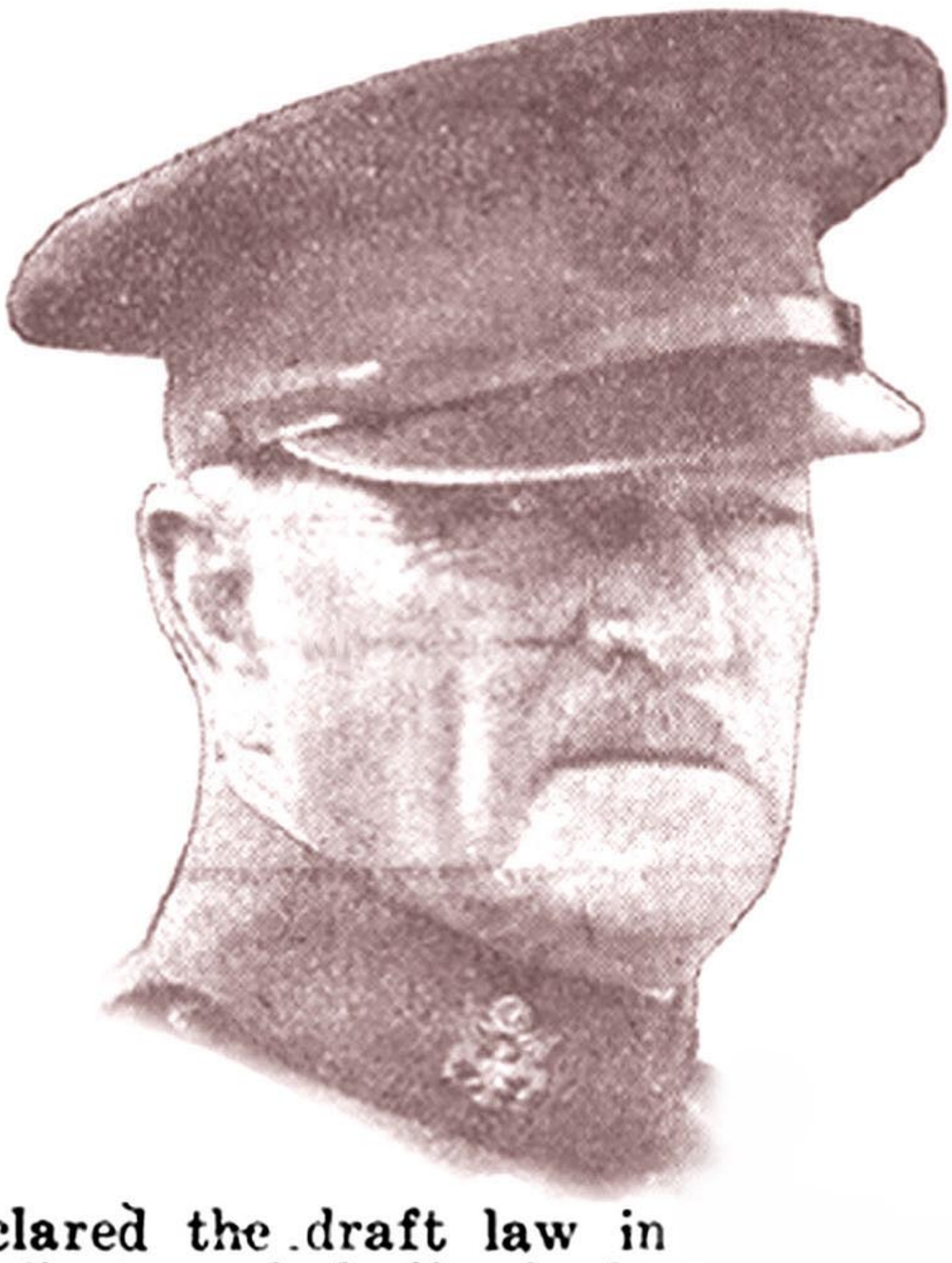
"These records I studied for some days and finally, purely on the basis of the records, selected General Pershing, whom I had never seen. My judgment, however, was reinforced by the fact that General Pershing had been in command of the punitive expedition in Mexico, with which I had been in daily contact by telegraph, over a long period of time.

"The punitive expedition in Mexico had a most difficult and responsible task and its leader was required to exercise tact, self-restraint and consideration for the rights of the Mexican people in a very high degree. The desires of the President with regard to that expedition were explicit and positive, and the limitations imposed on General Pershing's freedom as a military commander were dictated by considerations of public policy rather than military expediency. General Pershing met all the requirements with splendid ability and loyalty to the wishes of the President as Commander-in-Chief.

"Further, the [Mexican] expeditionary force under General Pershing was the largest body of troops in active service which any American general officer [then on the active list] had commanded.

"After I had made my selection I submitted it to the criticism of General Scott, who approved it. I then carried it to President Wilson, discussed it with him briefly, told him how I had arrived at it, and it met with his approval. I at once telegraphed General Pershing in code to report to me at Washington, which he did. He and I had many conferences, he establishing himself in an office in the War Department, where, in co-operation with the Chief of Staff, the preliminary plans for the Expeditionary Force [the A. E. F.] were worked out."

The selection of Pershing pleased the popular fancy, because the general's exploits in Mexico were fresh in the public mind. The Pershing announcement on May 18, 1917, however, was almost overshadowed by other news of the same day. President Wilson de-



clared the draft law in effect, and declined the offer of the late Colonel Roosevelt to raise a volunteer division. This latter brought a good deal of criticism upon the President because the declaration of war had wonderfully lifted the prestige of the militant and picturesque colonel. The Pershing choice, however, was brought forward by some as balm for the injured Roosevelt feelings. Roosevelt had "discovered" Pershing and in 1906 jumped him from captain to brigadier general over the heads of 862 other officers. There was a storm over it at the time. Major General Leonard Wood, whose ability Mr. Wilson greatly admired, but whom he regarded as insubordinate, was also a Roosevelt find.

While the wave of impulsive sympathy over Roosevelt's dashed World War hopes was reacting critically in the direction of the President, Mr. Wilson remarked in the course of a private conversation:

"Mr. Roosevelt does know a lot about war. He picked out Pershing and Wood. Wood is insubordinate, but I sent Pershing to France."

The battle-bound Pershing was scarce on the high seas before the hero-worshipping American public discovered that its information concerning its new leader was peculiarly one-sided. Everything was known of Pershing the soldier, and almost nothing of Pershing the man. This condition obtains to an amazing degree today, on the eve of the General's retirement from the Army. Where a million persons know of Pershing, the great military organizer and leader, not one person knows Pershing, the citizen, the man, with likes and dislikes, so much akin to those of his fellow members of the human race. The

answer is that Pershing is not a man of mystery; he is merely a man of modesty.

Pershing had not been in France very long before Heywood Broun of the New York *Tribune*, who hadn't been in France very long either, sought to remedy this paucity of Pershing personality stuff. He saw the general inspect some troops and started off his despatch with this sentence:

"They will never call him Papa Pershing."

The implieation, readily grasped at the time, was that General Pershing was deficient in those amiable qualities which gave Marshal Joffre his homely nickname. Papa Joffre was then in the United States, and his papa attributes were made much of and exaggerated by the newspaper boys. I saw the Marshal then and have seen him since at close range. The truth is that that usually genial old soul can be pretty petulant and irascible sometimes over trivial matters at which Pershing wouldn't turn a hair.

"There are two Pershings," Frederick Palmer told me once. "John Pershing, the man, and General John J. Pershing, the soldier. John Pershing, the man, is the best fellow I ever hope to meet. General John J. Pershing, the soldier, is the best soldier I ever hope to meet."

I have always noticed that in informal conversation Palmer habitually says "John Pershing" when relating something

personal about the General, but when he speaks in connection with military matters he says "General Pershing."

Pershing never had any popular nickname. "Black Jack" is newspaper fiction. They call him the Old Man, of course, but soldiers call every commanding officer that.

The correspondent who wrote "They will never call him Papa Pershing" wrote of Pershing the soldier. There is nothing to indicate that he ever got a glimpse of Pershing the man. When Pershing saw that line his comment is said to have been:

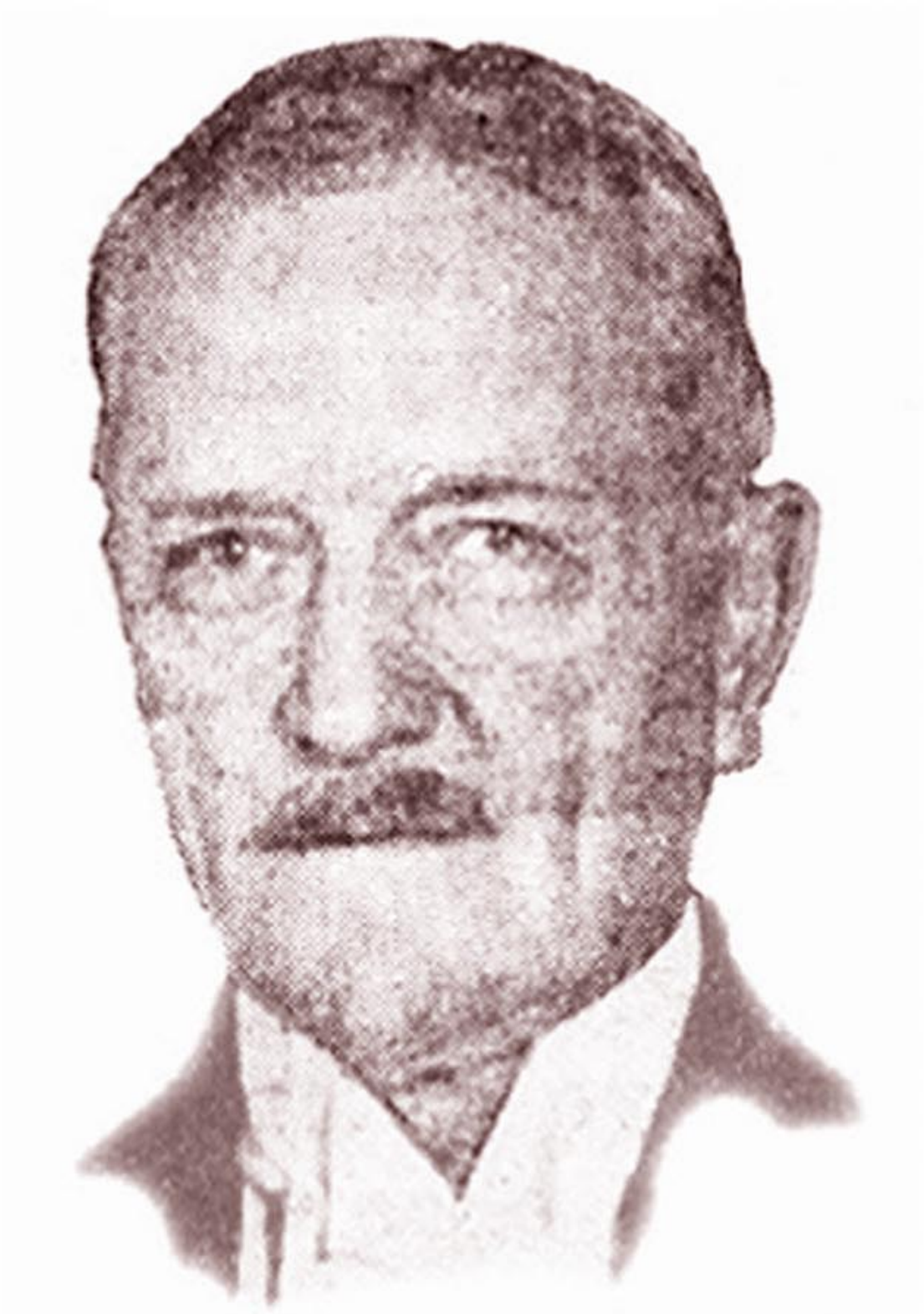
"No, I guess they won't."

In the Expeditionary Forces we did not deal with Pershing the man, but with Pershing the soldier. If Pershing had been thirty years younger in 1917 —if he had been a captain instead of a commander-in-chief — he would have been one of those captains who addressed his men as "Men" and not, "Now, boys." Soldiers know the types. This is not to say there weren't good captains of the "Now, boys" stamp. There were—plenty of them—but they were not of the Pershing pattern.

No, Pershing wasn't of the papa pattern for all that could be gathered during the war, but he had an abundant sense of humor, and no man with a sense of humor can be so very much lacking in sympathy or in the human qualities; particularly no man who enjoys a joke on himself, and Pershing does that. Pershing knows and tells most of the army stories we all heard over there, and these stories crack the officers pretty hard, and the higher the officer the harder the crack. Here is a story Pershing enjoys immensely and enjoys telling. Most of you have heard it, no doubt.

A lot of us in France fancied the St. Mihiel drive, which Pershing personally directed, would not let up until the American Army stormed the gates of Metz. Well, two soldiers were sloshing along in the muddy darkness on the road to Thiaucourt when one of them said:

"I hear Pershing's goin' to have us take Metz."



"Thasso?" mumbled the one addressed.

"Yea, Pershing's goin' to keep right on with this here drive until he takes Metz, even at the cost of a hundred thousand lives."

A silence, broken by the slogging of feet in the mud.

"One — hundred — thousand — lives," ruminated Soldier No. 2 reflectively. "Liberal son of a gun, ain't he?"

This is another Pershing story, and a true one, which I am told eventually got back to the General without any disastrous results:

Pershing was as punctilious about saluting as a conscientious corporal. When riding about in his car the general used to take his saluting cue from his chauffeur in front. When the chauffeur saluted the general saluted.

Now it seems a certain chauffeur knew this, and said to a buddy:

"Bet you five francs I can make the Old Man salute a French cow."

The wager was laid. Shortly thereafter the General was rolling over a country road out of Chaumont. The car would pass troops. The chauffeur would salute. Pershing would salute. But presently the chauffeur saluted, and the General saluted, though there were no troops in the offing—no nothing, except a contemplative French bossy fletcherizing her cud in an unmilitary manner.

Pershing has a tender heart. No one appreciated the responsibility of sending men into battle more than he. He seldom permitted himself to speak of it, but those who saw him daily during our advance from the Marne to the Vesle and during the hammering in the Argonne knew how the matter weighed on his mind. They often speak of it now. The grave of a soldier who fell in battle is holy ground to Pershing.

ON Memorial Day of 1919 General Pershing attended the ceremonies at Romagne Cemetery. On the cross-studded hillside he made an address which closed with these words:

"To the memory of these heroes, this sacred spot is consecrated as a shrine where future generations of men who love liberty may come and do homage. It is not for us to proclaim what they did. Their silence speaks more eloquently than words. It is up to us to uphold that for which they died. It is for the living to carry forward their purpose. Dear comrades, farewell."

General Pershing worked hard over that speech, as he works over every speech, for Pershing dreads talking in public. He wrote it, with many painful erasures and emendations, at Val des Ecoliers, the beautiful château which was the Commander-in-Chief's billet near Chaumont. When he had it in final form he called his aide, Colonel J. G. Quekemeyer. Quekemeyer found the General in a dressing gown in his study. The written speech was on his lap as he sat back.

"I want you to listen to this," said the General, putting on his spectacles and beginning to read.

As he reached the last lines—the ones quoted above—Pershing's voice grew husky and then ceased.

". . . Dear comrades, farewell," read the manuscript.

"Quekemeyer," said Pershing, "I don't know whether I can say it or not."

Pershing visited the cemeteries often. Looking over the crosses in the lonely burying ground at Beaumont, on the edge of the Argonne, he said to Hudson Hawley of the old *Stars and Stripes* staff:

"I am going to try to get back here every year, just about Memorial Day if I possibly can. I will go over these cemeteries and see that they are properly kept up, and I will see that these boys' families when they come over, will find everything as it should be."

Pershing has kept that vow. His last trip abroad, from which he returned in July, was for that very purpose. Due in a large measure to Pershing's personal interest, our cemeteries abroad are such as to fill the heart of any American with reverent pride.

The Pershing his old friends know is a man of kindly and considerate

sentiments, a quiet man of simple tastes and great personal charm; the sort of man who wears well—who will outwear many of the more demonstrative, hail-fellow-well-met kind. He calls his friends by their first names or by affectionate nicknames. He has grappled them to his heart with hoops of steel. Their loyalty and devotion to Pershing the man and the friend, like that to Pershing, their General, is absolute.

THE exigencies of war cost Pershing many a painful decision—decisions made more painful than otherwise because of the great reserve of the man. Indeed, close observers of Pershing during the war saw in him a constant struggle between will and sentiment, between what Pershing, the kind-hearted and ofttimes lonely man, would have liked to do, and what Pershing the military leader felt in duty bound to do. The will invariably triumphed.

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SEPTEMBER 12th is Defense Day.

It is a test of our preparedness to prevent war and our preparedness to preserve peace. It is a great national peace demonstration. It will determine whether the Legion-sponsored National Defense Act of 1920 would enable America to protect itself should it be menaced by an enemy.

Every able-bodied Legionnaire in every community has a part to play on Defense Day. Those who do not belong to the National Guard can take their places for a few hours in the Organized Reserve. Reserve Corps officers will explain to the assembled volunteers the details of our national defense system.

Flags will be displayed in home and shop and prayers will be offered for the preservation of peace. Announcements will be made of the plans for observing Defense Day in

each community. Watch for them in the newspapers.

And then turn out.

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Those who have been close to him have seen Pershing, worn and fagged, pull himself together with great effort and put new life into all those about him. They have seen him drive men to the utmost capacity of human endurance. They have seen him keep men going on moral strength alone, after physical strength had been spent; they have seen him do this himself. "My men are tired," complains a division commander. "They must have rest." "It's you who are tired," Pershing cuts back. "Continue the attack." Pershing would reanimate the division commander, who would revivify his worn battalions. Pershing relieved from command and sometimes sent home to the States old army friends, men for whom he had a warm personal affection. He relieved as division commander a former classmate at West Point.

Pershing's attitude toward his subordinates, especially junior officers, is one which does not permit the junior to forget the disparity of rank but is calculated to keep him from being flabbergasted by it. Above all, Pershing wants frankness and directness from a young officer—and these qualities may be disclosed without neglecting military punctilio in the least. When a young officer appears before the General with a proposal Pershing sometimes will question it, simply to discover how the proponent will behave in the face of opposition. What the General wants is for the young man to stand up for his case.

The War Department, like all other government departments, maintains a press relations section, or publicity bureau. General Pershing is the despair of that bureau. He simply won't perform. Pershing dislikes publicity and avoids it all he can. He has

an iron-clad rule against interviews except what might be called strategic ones on military matters. He will talk to newspaper men whom he knows, about other things—but the honor-bound understanding is that such talks are not interviews and are not to be published. The General declined to waive this rule with me for the purposes of this article, adding that "if I'd do it for anybody I'd do it for the Legion Weekly, you know that."

The government departments are full of trained seals who write speeches and statements for their superiors. Pershing writes his own. He wrote himself—the message to The American Legion which appears on page three of this issue of the Weekly. He did it one suffocating August evening, when tremendously pressed for time, a few hours before boarding a night train to leave Washington for the last time on a tour of military duty.

IT is painstaking work, this statement writing, and Pershing makes a hard job of it. All of his speeches are about preparedness. They are delivered in line of duty. Their object is to interest public opinion in the new scheme of national defense, the perfection of which has been Pershing's big work since he came home. But even this takes a good deal of persuading. Last year the General was urged to make a speaking tour of the Citizens' Military Training Camps.

"I suppose it is necessary," he said. "But I had rather take poison than go."

Pershing likes to joke about his experiences on the platform, though. One story he tells is that after making an address in Arizona a Civil War veteran shook hands with him and whispered in his ear:

"General, you're a damned sight better fighter than you are a speaker."

But to offset this, there is the time Pershing spoke in North Carolina. A boy about ten years old slipped through the crowd and asked the General if he could shake hands with him.

"General," said the young man, in the deepest voice he could command, "I want to congratulate you on your speech."

Pershing is not a phrase-maker. With the exception of "Lafayette, we are here," nothing that has been attributed to him stands out in the public mind, and it has been questioned whether Pershing ever said that. So many laconic quotations of history are fictitious. General Pershing really doesn't know whether he made that celebrated remark at the tomb of Lafayette or not. He spoke without notes and doesn't recall just what he did say. But certainly Colonel Charles E. Stanton uttered those pat and historic words, and possibly Pershing did, too.

Pershing does remember, however, what was said by a flowery orator who introduced the General at a dinner

A hitherto unpublished picture of the General firing a repeating shotgun at a trap shoot near Le Mans, France, in June, 1919. He missed the first bird, but got the second

since the war. The orator erected an eloquent climax which he capped by quoting the General as having exclaimed:

"La Follette, we have come!"

Pershing knew French well enough to talk over the head of his interpreter in France, but this knowledge did not come easily. Cadet Pershing found French particularly difficult at West Point, and used to cover his window with a blanket to shut out the light so that he could bone irregular verbs after Taps. One night he heard an instructor coming. He snatched down the blanket, doused the light and jumped into bed with his clothes on—but he didn't get away with it. He got six hours extra duty walking post. But he hammered along and mastered French, as he has mastered many things.

This habit of thoroughness soon impressed the Allied chiefs. The Count de Chambrun, a colonel on Marshal Foch's staff, says an early Allied estimate of Pershing was that here was a thorough, straightforward and tenacious man. The French and the British found him tenacious in his program for an American army. The British and French wanted to absorb the American units by companies and battalions into the Allied divisions. Pershing stood out for American divisions, corps and armies, led by American commanders and fighting in American style. All of the Allied leaders opposed this, but Pershing opposed them, and Pershing won. Pershing also contended for unity of command, which finally was agreed to under Foch. Pershing's voice in the Allied counsels of war came to have real weight. De Chambrun exclaimed after such a meeting at Amiens:

"The tremendous simplicity of the man! The native force! The absolute lack of knowledge of intrigue! Let him alone and he will command all of the armies."

Pershing's simplicity scored a triumph when the King and Queen of the Belgians came to visit the general at Chaumont. Pershing was not up on entertaining royalty, so he gave the King and Queen pancakes for breakfast and treated them as he would

anyone else he was glad to see. It went big with the Belgian rulers, who are as shy and democratic as you please. Had they heard the remark Pershing made just before he landed in New York in September of 1919, they might have said, "We know just how you feel." On this occasion Pershing was reminded of the great welcome in store for him.

"Yes," he replied. "I wish it were over with. I'm not much on these shows."

Pershing has enough medals to cover a carpet, but he wears only the ribbon of the American D. S. M. He declined to permit his name to be considered for a Congressional Medal of Honor for his services in the Philippines.

The General joined The American Legion in 1919 and has taken an active interest in the organization ever since. He attended the National Conventions at Kansas City in 1921 and at New Orleans the following year. At Kansas City he called himself "a private in the ranks of the Legion"—a remark which struck Marshal Foch, who was present, as very aptly depicting the democratic spirit of the organization. General Pershing said he would be at St. Paul this year, except for the proximity of Defense Day, which, on September 17th, marks the General's farewell to the Army.

General Pershing retires at midnight on the 12th because the 13th is his birthday. He will be sixty-four years old, which is the limit for officers in active service without authorization of Congress. This authorization would be forthcoming if the General wished it, but he prefers to enter private life. A number of projects and possibilities await his attention. He might, for instance, hang out a shingle announcing

JOHN J. PERSHING

ATTORNEY AT LAW

and built up a paying practice in a very short time, because Pershing is a lawyer and has been admitted to the bar. He studied law before he went to West Point in 1882 and took his degree in 1893 when he was tactical instructor wearing a yellow moustache of western proportions at the University of Nebraska. The General told me recently that if he had not adopted a military career he would have followed the law as a profession. And that was about all he told me, with leave to print, because he recalled he never gives

an interview unless he is cornered. I didn't have him cornered; it was the other way round.

He did, however, say some interesting things. It was a cruel predicament for a reporter.

"General," I protested at length, "it would be compounding a felony for me to keep this from the public."

"Well, I'll tell you," he said. "It isn't going to be kept from the public. I am going to put it in my book."

And there will be a book! Or at any rate so all the knowing ones say. One infers that the war will assume some new shapes when the C.-in-C. of the old A. E. F. tells what he knows about the inside of it. Pershing began work on his memoirs in 1920, and has been at them in his spare time ever since. The trouble is, though, that he has had next to no spare time. When he gets free of the Army he means to devote the most of his attention to this work, which, however, may not be published for several years. Thoroughness — that is Pershing, and that will be his book.

Had Pershing returned from the A. E. F. right after the Armistice, he would have done the dramatic thing. The country would have acclaimed him in a passion of hero worship. But Pershing stayed in France, first because he had a job to finish there, and second because the dramatic possibilities of a glorification trip home probably never occurred to his matter-of-fact mind.

When he did come back, ten months after the Armistice, there was no lack of warmth in the welcome. He was our hero. He was at the crest of the wave. He might have quit the Army then, with all his honors upon him. He might have quit the Army; his job with it was done; in a few years he would retire anyway. He might have retired then and taken any one of a number of business offers which were pressed upon him, and been a rich man now, instead of a poor one. But he didn't. It wouldn't have been the Pershing way.

His Army job *wasn't* done, either. He had a vision of a new plan of national defense; rather *a* plan of national defense, because we never had had one before. He set about to make that plan a fact. The reorganization of the Regular Army and the National Guard were details. He did it. The organization of the Officers Reserve Corps was another detail. He did it. The passage of the National Defense Act of 1920 was another. He saw that it was done. Plans for the mobilization of industry were another factor. Pershing attended to it. Citizens Training Camps and military training in more colleges were needed. Pershing brought it about.

And in these first years after the war the Army and military prestige went low. The inevitable backwash sucked them into the trough of the wave. Pershing held on. He played to empty

hanches. He met every manner of discouragement. But he stuck. He worked twelve hours a day. No applause. No one looking on. The simplicity, the courage, the relentless tenacity of the man carried him through.

He turned the corner. He suggested the Defense Test and the President ordered it. The country has supported it. This test will be a public showing of the plan which Pershing methodically perfected in those colorless post-war years. The public will not grasp it all this year. Or next year. But in time it will sink in.

Pershing regards the completion of this defensive system as the greatest achievement of his career. In his view nothing else he has done in his long and serviceable life means so much to the security of his country. It doesn't matter to him if the events of twenty years are required to prove it. It doesn't matter to him if his name is never mentioned when that revelation comes. It isn't known as the Pershing plan now, and more than likely it never will be. This suits Pershing entirely. And it explains him.

A staff officer on duty at the War Department told me he thought Pershing's success could be laid to the fact that he had approached the problem from the civilian as well as the army point of view. Pershing appreciates that the "splendid isolation" of the Regular Army is history. The days of a small, elect, aloof, professional military caste are gone. Armies go to war no longer; nations go. In projecting and executing his new design, which comprehends the reconciliation of a thousand perplexing components, which touch you and me and Neighbor Brown, Pershing calculatingly placed himself in the position of the civilian—the critical civilian who didn't understand the Regular Army and didn't care to.

"How does this set-up strike you, gentlemen?"

"From the point of view of the staff it is excellent."

"But from the point of view of the man on the outside?" reminds Pershing. "How will it strike him? Put yourself in John Citizen's shoes."

That the man-on-the-outside point of view may not be lacking Pershing has seeded the bureaus of the War Department with new faces—with officers who came in from civil life during the war. He calls reserve officers to duty for a spell to get their slant. He has reserve officers permanently on duty with the reserve section of the General Staff. He has National Guard officers permanently on duty with the National Guard section. The old Army is in step with the new times.

Pershing makes his adieux to that Army looking forward. He says farewell to forty-two years of military service with his eyes on the lively concerns of tomorrow and not on the reposeful

glories of yesterday. He is spending his last month of active duty with whom? With old soldiers—elderly generals in posts of direction and leadership? No, sir. He has spent his life among *them*, and if they do not know their jobs by this time, four weeks more with Pershing will not make any appreciable difference. Pershing is spending this month with young civilians. He is making one more of those painful speaking excursions — a swing which takes him from Omaha to Boston—talking to and talking with youths at drill in the Citizens' Military Training Camps, and reserve officers who ar brushing up the same way.

Once a cavalryman, always one. Next to mankind John J. Pershing loves horseflesh, and he is a good deal more at home with some horses than he is with some people. He takes leave of his military life with the unconscious grace of an old cavalryman who mounts a good horse—and knows it is a good horse—and rides off into a twilight which greatly resembles the dawn.